



I-10 widening on target to start early next year

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The state says construction crews are on target to start widening Interstate 10 in the Southwest Valley early next year.

But adding lanes to the freeway through Avondale and Goodyear is not expected to be a long-term solution to commuter nightmares, especially as the Southwest Valley's population swells.

The freeway in that area narrows from three lanes to two each way. The acceleration, which is on track after the State Transportation Board approved its costs Friday, will bring the number of lanes to five in each direction.

Yet, the number of drivers who use the road is expected to more than double in the coming decades.

On average, 115,000 vehicles drove daily on I-10 between Loop 101 and Sarival Avenue in 2005, state Department of Transportation figures show.

By 2030, 258,000 vehicles are expected to pass that same 8-mile stretch. The estimate even accounts for traffic that will be diverted to I-10 relievers in the Southwest Valley, Arizona 801 and Loop 202.

"These are improvements, but you won't hear these classified as solutions," ADOT spokesman Timothy Tait said, referring to the widening.

A comparison of Valley traffic volume shows about 236,000 vehicles travel I-10 at the Broadway Curve daily. About 226,000 pass on I-10 at 35th Avenue near Interstate 17.

Kellyann Smith was trudging through I-10 traffic on a recent afternoon on her way home to Goodyear after visiting family in the north Valley. The drive, which should have taken her 25 minutes, was drawn out to 40 minutes.

She hopes the widening will reduce congestion.

"It took me an eternity," Smith, 35, said. "I was even in the carpool lane. I looked at my watch and thought, I should have been home by now."

In preparing for the expansion, ADOT did not calculate how long it takes to travel those 8 miles on I-10 during rush hour or the average speed during rush hour because "the need is clear" for more lanes, Tait said.

Bickering among Avondale, Goodyear and Litchfield Park ended Thursday when the cities compromised on how to split up interest costs that have to be paid to bump up construction by four years.

The State Transportation Board sealed the agreement at a special meeting Friday.

"There's a highway that needs to be widened desperately," board Chairman Joe Lane said. "Had we not acted today, it'd have been a real boondoggle."

Now, ADOT is getting ready to advertise the project to contractors. Construction on the \$153 million expansion could start at the beginning of next year and last until summer 2010.

Reach the reporter at (602) 444-6511.

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This badly needed widening, will create another bottleneck at Sarival Ave. Widening to MC85 should have been the goal, but Buckeye went Out To Lunch on this one. It is their commuters that will suffer the new bottleneck!!!!

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